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MUSIC.

WAGNER'S "LOHENGRIN."

RICHARD WAGNER'S path to fame has been even more rough and thorny than that of most children of genius. Born and bred in a period when it was high treason to attempt to traverse the established forms of music, every effort was received with caustic criticism, and every deviation from the acknowledged school derided and condemned. While his avowed determination to establish a new school of music may be rightly regarded as the overweening conceit of a musical enthusiast, it can not now be denied that Wagner's influence has had and still has a most marked and beneficial effect upon music. Like Schumann, he was weary of the everlasting sameness and tameness of modern compositions. There was a surfeit of emotional measures which, dream-like, came almost without volition, and certainly with no tax upon the brain. Both Schumann, in his life, and Wagner, have striven to force intellect into music, and that, too, without destroying the heart element, without which music would be cheerless and unsatisfactory. We are not in sympathy with Wagner's theory that music must be so wedded to the libretto as to be merely a dramatic expression of the sentiment, nor does he himself carry out this idea. It is true that he, in a large degree, ignores melody, and fills his operas with recitative, but throughout there is an adaptation of music to the words, both in melody and recitative, which enhances in the highest degree the dramatic force of the composition. Except in orchestral selections, and notably by Theodore Thomas, we have been treated to but little of Wagner's works. "Das Liebesverbot," after Shakspeare's "Measure for Measure," "Rienzi," after Bulwer, and "Der fliegende Holländer," are known to comparatively few. "Tannhäuser," which was produced at Dresden in 1844, and "Lohengrin," which was first heard at Weimar in 1850, are his only operas, so far as we recall, which have ever been represented in this country. It is a mark of growth in musical culture that there is now a demand to hear such works, and that Verdi's "Aida," which belongs to the Wagner school, and now "Lohengrin," are accepted in the regular repertoire of the Italian opera.

To Max Strakosch belongs the credit of having produced in New York a series of operas which, taken all together, have surpassed any previous representations. We do not except even the famous days of Castle Garden, when Jenny Lind, Alboni, Mario, and other great artists, made that opera house historical. The outlay for orchestra, chorus, brilliant properties, and the other thousand-and-one necessary adjuncts to a complete performance, has been made with a lavish hand, and the New-Yorker of to-day may now answer with emphasis the croakings of the early patrons of the opera, that the good old times have come back, and that the opera is better presented than ever before in America.

The production of such an opera as "Lohengrin" is an event worthy of special record. It is true that it was brought out at the Stadt Theatre (and very creditably, too) in 1871, but the representation was confined mainly to the German population who alone frequent that place of amusement. "Tannhäuser" was produced at the same time by the same company. With these exceptions, as we have already stated, we believe Wagner's operas have not been heard in New York. The cast on the present occasion is as follows: *Elsa*, Madame Christine Nilsson; *Ortrud*, Miss Annie Louise Cary; *Lohengrin*, Signor Italo Campanini; *Frederick*, Signor Del Puente; *Henry* (the king), Signor Nannetti; *The King's Herald*, Herr Blum. Conductor, Signor Emanuel Muzio.

This, briefly, is the plot: *Frederick* of Telramund, who claims the sovereignty of Brabant, charges *Elsa* with the murder of her brother Gottfried in order to secure the crown for herself. In the presence of the king and army assembled at Antwerp, it is agreed to submit the charge to the arbitrament of the sword. *Elsa*, in despair, calls upon a knight whom she has seen in a vision, who presently arrives in a scallop-shell drawn by a swan. As her champion, she betroths herself to him, first promising never to ask him his name or nativity. *Lohengrin* and *Frederick* fight, and the latter is overcome. His life is spared, though his honors and possessions are taken from him. *Ortrud*, his wife, fills *Elsa's* mind with suspicions of *Lohengrin*. In the bridal chamber *Elsa* asks the forbidden questions. *Lohengrin*, in presence of the king and nobles, declares himself to be a son of Percival, Knight of the Holy Grail, to whose guardianship he must now return. The swan appears, and, being disenchanted, becomes Gottfried, who assumes control of his dukedom. A dove takes the place of the swan at the scallop-shell, and *Lohengrin* is borne away forever—or until called before the curtain to receive the plaudits of a delighted audience.

It will be seen, even from this brief outline, that there is an excellent opportunity for the display of poetic and dramatic power. The hatred of *Frederick* and his clamorous ambition for rule; the anxiety, despair, exultation, joy, and final misery of *Elsa*; the scheming jealousy of *Ortrud*; the martial pride and manly affection of *Lohengrin*; the brilliant array of nobles and ladies, afford ample field for the poet and musician.

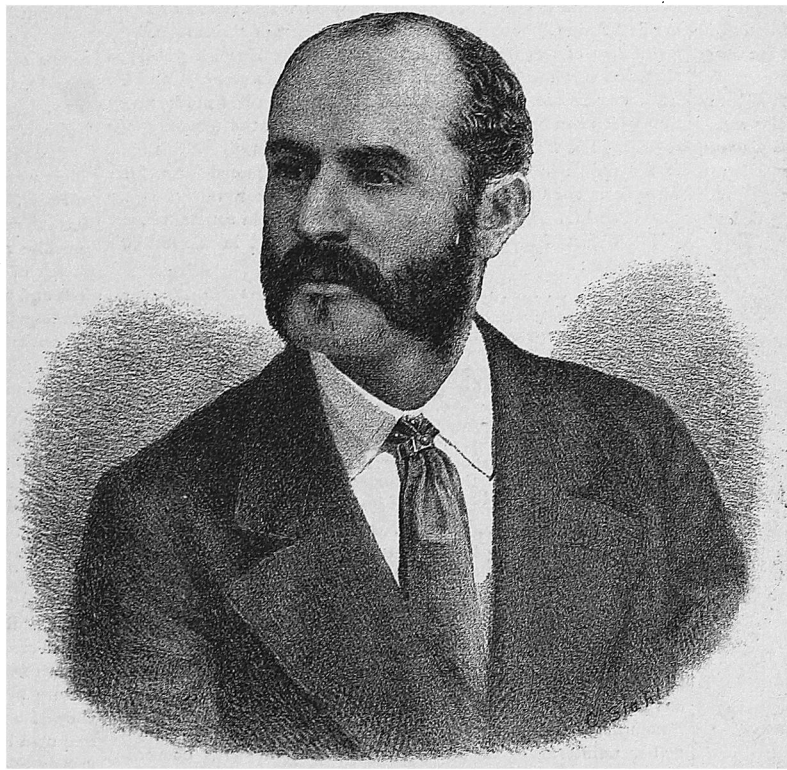
That much depends upon the "setting" of such a work is evident, and some are disposed to attribute the principal success to the scenic artist, stage carpenter, and costumer; but certainly these will not account for the hearty applause with which the vast audience greeted the overture and numerous orchestral passages during the performance.

The company seemed to enter into the spirit of the composition with unusual zest, and the whole was presented without a single noticeable error, or any unnecessary delay. Nilsson, who will be remembered with as great satisfaction as any lyric artist who has sung in this city, was, as usual, superb, both in voice and the highly dramatic action necessary to the rôle of *Elsa*. In the character of *Ortrud*, a very difficult part, Miss Cary confirmed in the

highest degree, the expectations aroused by her masterly performance in "Aida." No singer has made such rapid advances in her art as this young lady, who evinces rare genius and an industry that is indefatigable. The *King Henry* of Nannetti was given with fervor and *empressment*. The part, however, does not call into full action the power of this excellent basso. *Frederick*, on the other hand, filled with jealousy, the offspring of ambition, and, after his degradation, with bitter malice and revenge, gave to Del Puente a rare opportunity which he fully improved. He was admirable dramatically, and executed the music with intelligent expression and fine feeling. To Campanini this was the occasion for which he seems to have held in reserve his highest powers. There is wonderful brilliancy in the notes of his upper register, and in that register his part is largely written. He thrilled the audience with a magnificently sustained note in the phrase "Elsa! io t' amo!" and also with the exquisite sweetness and pathos with which he rendered the aria (for here, at least, there is some approach to a melody) "Da voi lontan," etc., declaring his nativity, and his immediate return to the land of the Holy Grail. In such a performance, the work of the conductor should not be overlooked. It is felt in this case in the admirable training of the orchestra and chorus, and Signor Muzio fairly won the recognition of an enthusiastic call before the curtain. The several artists were also many times subjected to a like pleasing ordeal, and Mr. Strakosch himself, the most efficient and modest of impressarios, was compelled to come before the audience and receive the plaudits which New York gladly accords him for his most successful efforts of the past season.

MAX STRAKOSCH.

Max Strakosch, the young impressario whose name is now so honorably associated with the development of the lyric stage in America, is, we believe, an Austrian by birth. The younger brother of Maurice Strakosch, now the manager of the Italian opera in



MAX STRAKOSCH.—FROM PHOTO. BY MORA.

Paris, he was, at an early age, thrown amid musical associations, and indoctrinated into the mysteries of artistic and managerial life. Maurice Strakosch's marriage to Amalia Patti made him practically guardian of her celebrated sister, Adelina Patti, the management of whose affairs took him to Europe. Max Strakosch remained in this country and entered into the business of a caterer of the highest classes of public amusements. First, as an agent, he attracted attention by his close application to business, by his unswerving fidelity to the trusts reposed in him, and by a genial suavity of manner which won for him a wide popularity. He was not long content with a subordinate position, however; and in a short time we find him a manager by right—fairly launched in the business on his own account. After various minor enterprises, he made his first great stroke by bringing to this country Mlle. Nilsson, whose career during her first visit to America was directed by himself, aided by Mr. Jarrett, the lady's business agent. The triumphal success of Nilsson is well known. At first she appeared in concerts, then in oratorio, and finally in opera.

A year later, we find Max Strakosch conducting a concert season at Steinway Hall, with Nilsson as his prima donna and a number of first-class artists associated with her. Then he tried the experiment of bringing her (now Madame Nilsson-Rouzaud) out for a second time. This was a dubious experiment, for in the judgment of many this artist would be no longer a novelty, and consequently would fail to draw. It is always dangerous, too, to attempt to repeat a great success. Mr. Strakosch, however, had faith in his lucky star, and engaged Nilsson once more. Just before the opening of his campaign, the financial panic spread over the country. The people most affected by it were precisely those who were the recognized supporters of the lyric drama. Mr. Strakosch, however, made no change in his plans, but with a very expensive company on his salary list, boldly entered the field. At first the struggle was a hard one. People were disposed to detect a fancied deterioration in the voice of Nilsson, and were reluctant to award to the supporting members of the company the credit their merits deserved. Yet, despite all this, the fall season turned out favorably, and the spring season has been one of unusual variety, bril-

liancy, and success. The campaign of 1873-4 has been distinguished by the production, in advance of either London or Paris, of those colossal works, "Aida" and "Lohengrin." For both of these the American public is indebted to Mr. Strakosch. But for his liberality and energy they might never have been heard here.

Mr. Strakosch has made arrangements with his brother Maurice by which he will be enabled to secure for the New York operatic stage all the best artists who may appear at Les Italiens in Paris. He expects to have the direction of the Academy of Music next fall, and is now elaborating plans for a season which shall equal, if not surpass, the notable season of 1873-4.

Of Mr. Strakosch's many admirable personal traits we do not propose here to speak at length. It is sufficient to say that to zeal in musical matters, he adds prudence. A good business man, he knows well how to guide, excite, or pacify, as occasion may require, the impetuous artistic elements by which he is surrounded. His versatility as a linguist, his genial manners and his well-known courtesy, make him always a popular and welcome guest. He is liberal to his artists and always ready to help struggling merit. Certainly, if success be any criterion of merit, Max Strakosch, as the recognized impressario of Italian opera in America, is emphatically the right man in the right place.

DRAMA.

A WINTER of unusual distress in the metropolis, caused by the financial revulsion and the consequent lack of employment for those who are dependent upon their daily labor for a livelihood, created a wide-spread feeling of charity and benevolence, which pervaded all classes of the community. With an extra army of ten thousand poor people to feed and care for daily, the resources of the regularly organized charitable institutions of the city were overtaxed, and it was needful that outside aid should be forthcoming. This was promptly provided by private munificence, public subscriptions, and almost innumerable musical and dramatic entertainments. Of all the professions and classes of people in New York, it is noteworthy that none have surpassed the actors in their efforts to give prompt and substantial aid to the suffering. During the first weeks of spring several notable dramatic performances took place, which yielded tens of thousands of dollars.

On Thursday, the 19th of March, an extraordinary entertainment was given for "sweet charity's sake" at the Academy of Music, which yielded over six thousand dollars. Sheridan's old and well-known comedy, "The School for Scandal," which was first performed at Drury Lane Theatre on the 8th of March, 1777, was played by the best actors of the two best comedy theatres in America, Wallack's and Daly's Fifth Avenue. Mr. George L. Fox, of the Grand Opera House, and Mrs. Jennings, formerly Miss Madeline Henriques, gave the strength of their support to the play, the whole performance being under the control of Messrs. Augustin Daly and Lester Wallack. The memorable and exceptional cast of "The School for Scandal" upon this occasion, was as follows: *Sir Peter Teazle*, Mr. John Gilbert; *Sir Oliver Surface*, Mr. John Brougham; *Joseph Surface*, Mr. Charles Fisher; *Charles Surface*, Mr. Lester Wallack; *Crabtree*, Mr. W. Davidge; *Moses*, Mr. Harry Beckett; *Sir Benjamin Backbite*, Mr. Louis James; *Careless*, (with song), Mr. Edward Arnott; *Rowley*, Mr. D. Whiting; *Trip*, Mr. George L. Fox; *Snake*, Mr. J. W. Carroll; *Sir Harry Bumper*, Mr. C. E. Edwin; *Lady Teazle*, Miss Madeline Henriques (Mrs. L. J. Jennings); *Mrs. Candour*, Miss Fanny Morant; *Lady Sneerwell*, Madame Ponisi; *Maria*, Miss Dora Goldthwaite; *Maid*, Miss M. Griffiths; *Guests and Servants*, J. W. Peck, F. Chapman, W. J. Leonard, G. Gilbert, J. F. Josephs, W. Beekman, J. Curran, M. Dan-eau, Miss Jennie Ross, Miss L. Burroughs, Miss

S. Congdon, Miss N. Everett, Miss E. Griffiths, Miss C. Bate, and Miss J. Clarke. With such a cast the rendering of the play was exceptionally brilliant, making it an occasion of rare interest.

Five great charity performances were given in New York on the afternoon of the 26th of March, which netted in gross receipts near thirty thousand dollars. At the Union Square Theatre over two thousand people were turned away, unable to witness, for the want of room, the drama of "The Geneva Cross" with its original cast. The same scenes were witnessed at the Lyceum Theatre, where every seat was reserved by those anxious to witness Miss Clara Morris's *début* in "Camille." She was supported by Mr. Frank Mayo, who has made a decided sensation at Niblo's Garden with his American idyl of "Davy Crockett." Miss Morris's assumption of the part of *Camille* was very successful. At Booth's Theatre, Mr. Boucicault played in "Kerry," and Mrs. J. B. Booth in "The Lady of Lyons," to an audience of nearly four thousand people. At Niblo's Garden, Mr. George L. Fox and a variety troupe entertained an immense audience, estimated at five thousand. Mme. Aimée, of opera bouffe fame, sang "La Fille de Madame Angot" at the Academy of Music, which, like the other places of amusement, was filled to overflowing. For the suggestion and plan of these great charity benefits, the public is understood to be indebted to Mr. A. M. Palmer, of the Union Square Theatre. These dramatic events, in the name of charity, may be regarded as the most extensive and brilliant efforts ever made in New York.

"Charity" is the timely title of a thoroughly good English play, from the pen of Mr. Gilbert, which has recently been produced by Mr. Daly at the New Fifth Avenue Theatre, where it has enjoyed the undiminished favor of the public. Not so sprightly as French plays of the same nature, it deals in an interesting manner with one of the great social questions of the day, advocating the side of virtue and charity. Miss Ada Dyas and Miss Fanny Davenport assume leading rôles, proving themselves mistresses of their art.

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